

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Office of the Administrator
Washington, DC 20546-0001



June 4, 2012

Dr. Steven W. Squyres
Chairman
NASA Advisory Council
Washington, DC 20546

STEVE
Dear Dr. Squyres:

Enclosed is NASA's response to the recommendation from the NASA Advisory Council meeting held on March 8-9, 2012, at NASA Headquarters. Please do not hesitate to contact me should the Council require further background on the response. I appreciate the Council's thoughtful consideration leading to the recommendations and welcome its continued findings, recommendations, and advice concerning the U.S. civil space program.

I look forward to working closely with you and members of the Council in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "C. Bolden, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Charles F. Bolden, Jr.
Administrator

Enclosure:

2012-01-05 (SC-01) Recovering the Planetary Exploration Program

NASA Advisory Council Recommendation

Recovering the Planetary Exploration Program 2012-01-05 (SC-01)

Recommendation:

The Council recommends that NASA seek restoration of funds in its FY14 budget proposal to repair the damage done to the Nation's robotic planetary exploration program within the context, but not at the expense of a balanced science program that has already absorbed numerous funding reductions in recent years. The Council concurs with the Science Mission Directorate's (SMD's) initiative to reformulate the Mars Exploration Program for missions in 2018-2020 in partnership with human space flight, technology development, and potential international partners, pending any Congressional direction and under the condition that the plan must be consistent with Decadal Survey recommendations.

Major Reasons for the Recommendation:

The FY13 budget proposal contains a precipitous drop in funding for the Planetary Science Division and sets the program on a decline in the out years reducing the flight rate for Discovery and New Frontiers missions, terminating operating missions before their prime, and removing funding for the 2016 and 2018 Mars missions planned in collaboration with the European Space Agency (ESA). The funds remaining do not allow for a Mars mission in 2016 but may be sufficient for a medium-class mission in 2018 or 2020.

Consequences of No Action on the Recommendation:

The current funding profile for the Nation's robotic planetary exploration program will sacrifice critical capabilities and our leadership to other space-faring nations as they pursue capabilities and goals abandoned by the United States.

NASA Response:

The FY2013 budget request reflects difficult budget decisions in this difficult budget environment. Given these constraints, SMD and the Planetary Science program have studies currently underway on how best to move forward. Since the NAC made this recommendation, both the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations have crafted FY 2013 appropriations bills that make program and funding recommendations for Planetary Science. NASA will use the outcome of the aforementioned studies and the outcome of the FY2013 appropriations process to inform its future planning, including formulation of the FY2014 budget request.